

Sketch

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Article 3

Night / Mexico / Rest Then...

Helen M. Pundt*

*Iowa State College

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Helen M. Pundt

IT ISN'T often that *Sketch* publishes three pages of one person's poems. Helen Pundt is the exception. Her verse is *the* outstanding verse of this campus. She can handle the difficult sonnet form well. She can convey a mood strongly with force and with delicacy. We take these few pages, then, to present her hitherto unpublished verse.

Miss Pundt has a unique position on this campus, both as a student and as a house-director at Lincoln Way Cottage. She is an Education major in the Home Economics Division, a junior. Helen's home is Rochester, New York, where she has worked as a secretary. At one time she traveled in Europe—England, France, and Italy. So that when she writes "Lake Lucerne," she doesn't mean Lake Laverne. Her poem on Mexico is the result of a summer there.

About her poetry. Helen says, "My sonnets have to be re-written time and time again. It's hard to keep an emotional unity when you're struggling with mechanics." For instance, in the fourth sonnet she writes almost tritely, "and love's attendant rue", to rhyme with "you." When Bernard DeVoto read this he said, "I'm not going to let you get away with that, my dear." Repeated attempts at anything besides "rue" were unproductive; so the poem is incomplete. But when you consider that only the really great poets make no mistakes—well, it isn't bad.

1

NIGHT

Her shadow falls upon the eastern gate,
And everything that breathes now holds its breath.
Hushed for her whispered step, all things await
The scent of dew-drenched fragrance cool as death.
Her black hair undulates across the sky
As from the west she gathers scarlet leaves
Before she hangs her copper lamp on high
And lights her candles under crystal sheaths.

This is the hour of prayer. See how her dress
Falls down in purple ripples as she kneels.
This is the hour when earth forgets distress
And learns from night the deepened quiet that heals.
But now the restless trees begin to sigh,
And in the sibilant rushes young frogs cry.

2

This restless fog that shifts about our years
Cannot conceal the dead from him who seeks;
Ever from quiet print some mind appears
To challenge with the old the new conceits;
Ever some spirit wakes upon the page,
Unfettered, from the tomb-cloths of decay;
There one may seek a friendship with the sage,
The king, or poet of another day.

May I then hope that someone yet unborn,
Emerged from Time at length, will seek me here
And find me, though long since of substance shorn,
In human good and earthly faults a peer?
Here is my hand; then feel it, friend unknown,
These narrow fingers cool upon your own.

3

When this reluctant flesh forsakes its mold
And by the laws of chemistry finds release,
Crumbles against the earth's indifferent hold
And brings the golden cycle to surcease,

Within that rich decay will there remain
No vestige of this crying appetite?
Can melted snow and equinoctial rain
Wash from the moldered ash the shattered light?

Or will some part of me still ride the gale,
Crash with the tide against a Scottish shore,
Plunge through the naked trees in brittle hail,
Or drift with snow against a lighted door?

What greed is this that will not let me be
An unknown silence in eternity?

4

You were the things I loved when first we met:
The covered bridge that crosses Lake Lucerne,
Long lights in blackened waters, pavements wet,
The skyline of New York, a Wedgewood urn.

You were Orion on a frosty night,
November fog and woodsmoke in the air,
Beethoven's Fifth and wheedling gulls in flight,
The lift of spring, the touch of new-washed hair.

You were these things I had and many more
Until you left and took them all with you,
Released me from the ever-binding store
Of too much love and love's attendant rue.

Now I may set my feet upon the stone—
Free and unburdened—empty and alone.

MEXICO

Purple peaks invade the sky,
Bone-white sand devours the ground.

Shrunken peons filter by,
Laden peons homeward bound.

Centuries of purple peaks,
Centuries of bone-white sands.

Centuries of shriveled cheeks,
Centuries of burden-bands.



REST THEN, . . .

Rest then, and never let this peace be known,
For there are jealous hands that must destroy,
And the one-eyed
Who still believe the world is flat,
And the dumb—
How shall they know that words
Can rocket to the sky
And burst into a myriad bubbled lights,
Trail off, and fade into the silence
And the unmeasured stars?

We cannot share
This strange perfection which is ours
And ours alone.
Rest then
And never let this peace be known.

—*Helen Pundt.*